

March 18, 1991

Mr. William Golden, Co-Chair
Mr. Joshua Lederbert, Co-Chair
Carnegie Commission on Science,
Technology, and Government
10 Waverly Place
New York, New York 10003

Dear Bill and Josh:

My good intentions to respond prior to March 15, as requested, evaporated in an excessively busy time. Much of the competing activity was shared with Bill, which makes me that much more admiring of his various accomplishments. My sense of imminent overload, which I share with many of my colleagues, also dictates against the wisdom of committing to attend the retreat at Woods Hole. I did mark it on my calendar, and if, as the time approaches it seems possible, I will try and attend.

You have asked for comment on the proposed themes for discussion at the retreat. Here it is.

Of all the materials you sent, I found President Carter's letter the most cogent. I agree with him that the work of the Commission will derive strength from "a transcendent and somewhat inspirational approach." I also share his pessimism about making constructive changes within departments and agencies, if they involve relatively focused matters. Perhaps it is my experience over 30 years as a federal government employee that accounts for my pessimism. But from what I saw, I know that only very rarely do the bureaucratic interpretations of wise policy recommendations actually wind up achieving the recommendation's ends; often they have the opposite effect and almost always they add to the burdens of those working in government with no positive balancing effect.

The view just expressed suggests that the June meeting can be very important. From the meeting, and from the enormous amount of detailed work that has already been done and is being done, the expression of a consensus on the main themes and

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conclusions for the final report will determine how effective the work may be. I would like to offer two ideas which I believe can help to shape the consensus toward which the Commission will strive.

First, the potential and actual effects of governmental and social systems on the formulation and implementation of policies regarding science and technology should be measured by their effect on science and technology, not necessarily on how they influence intergovernmental communications or policy links. It is not necessarily true that devices that improve or facilitate science policy-making will improve the conduct of science and technology. I have been particularly struck by this in the international arena. Formal agreements for exchanges of information or personnel or for collaborative work are frequently rather sterile compared to the vast, informal international network that is an integral part of many scientists lives.

Many of the issues raised in the proposed themes, not to mention the activities of Allan Bromley, suggest that whatever organizational frameworks are adopted, assurances of strong leadership are essential. Thus another measure against which recommendations should be evaluated is whether they diminish or reinforce the capability for leadership in science and technology...in the Congress and in the Executive Branch. It is not necessary to look further than the disastrous effects that the absence of leadership has had on the National Institutes of Health over now almost two years. Also, the absence of strong leadership in the Congress has resulted in the dismaying fact that half a billion dollars is being spent this year on science facilities projects in the complete absence of merit evaluation while the National Science Foundation can give out, with peer review, a total of only 20 million dollars.

To summarize, the following elements in the themes seem more important to me than others: IC, IIB, IIIA, IIIB.

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One small point: in the Summary of Theme IA on page 2, it is stated that our past S&T agenda has been driven primarily by Cold War considerations. The Cold War period, however, saw the development and expansion of the National Institutes of Health as a major element in our S&T agenda; its budgets always exceed that of the National Science Foundation. The NIH's agenda, almost entirely dedicated to research rather than health care, was driven by the high interest of Congress and the people in improving health.

I hope that this is helpful. Very best regards to you both,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Maxine".

Maxine F. Singer

MFS/sb